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Contents

	Page
THE ROAD WE HAVE TRAVELED: FIVE DECADES OF BUILDING THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY IN THE UNITED STATES: 1919-1969 By George Novack	3
THE COURSE OF U.S. IMPERIALISM AND THE REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE FOR A SOCIALIST AMERICA (Draft Political Resolution submitted by the Political Committee)	11
BLACK CAUCUSES IN THE TRADE UNIONS (Political Committee Memorandum)	25

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THE ROAD WE HAVE TRAVELED: FIVE DECADES OF BUILDING THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY IN THE UNITED STATES: 1919-1969

By George Novack

1969 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the split in the Socialist Party which resulted in the formal constitution of the communist movement as an independent party in the United States. The next stage in constructing the revolutionary party in this country must continue and extend the actual road followed by the revolutionary vanguard over that half century. It must be based upon the main lessons to be derived from all the complex and difficult experiences in creating a political organization capable of leading the working masses, white and black, to the conquest of power in the stronghold of world imperialism.

I. The First Ten Years of American Communism and the Origins of American Trotskyism

The American Communist Party arose out of the impact of two colossal international events on American radicalism. One was the First World War; the other was the Russian Revolution. Its origins testify to the decisive part played by world developments in shaping American history and its revolutionary components in particular. This fact also refutes the outlook of those provincial-minded nativists who in theory or practice want to delete the influence of international factors from the American scene.

The formation of the CP represented an immense step forward in Marxist doctrine and party organization. It initiated the assimilation of the return to authentic scientific socialism and the enrichment of its teachings accomplished by the leadership of Lenin, Trotsky and their associates in making the Russian Revolution. Above all, it replaced the primitive, loose, heterogeneous, all-inclusive concept of party organization practiced by the Socialist Party of Hillquit, Berger and Debs, which miserably failed to pass the test of events after 1917, with the superior Bolshevik model. This was to be a politically homogeneous and democratically centralized organization, based on a principled program and guided by a clear revolutionary perspective. These advances have remained permanent acquisitions of American Marxists.

The history of the American CP in the first decade after its formation falls into two distinct and opposing periods. During the heroic period up to 1923 the founders of the party attracted the cream of the revolutionary elements in the country and worked with some success to weld these initial cadres together on the new foundations charted by the Third International. In its personnel, program and perspectives, our own movement was a lineal descendant and direct inheritor of this rebirth of revolutionary consciousness and activity under the banner of Leninism.

This progressive period was followed by five years of intense and blind factional warfare from 1923 to 1928 which impeded and disoriented the party. Its gradual degeneration, which began in the middle of the twenties and was virtually completed by the end of the decade, was the consequence of two different factors, one national, the other international.

The deadening conservatism of American life and politics, generated by the unprecedented boom of American capitalism from 1922 to 1929 coincided with the reactionary swing in the Soviet Union as the Stalinist bureaucracy rose to power. As Stalinism came to dominate the Comintern the intervention and influence of the Russian leadership which had inspired and invigorated the American revolutionists in Lenin's day, turned into its opposite and became a source of unmitigated evil. The combination of these two powerful adverse factors corrupted most of the original CP leadership and confused its ranks.

These retrogressive processes culminated in the expulsion of the first adherents to the Communist Left Opposition from the CP in November 1928. This schism inaugurated an entirely new chapter in the struggle for the construction of a revolutionary vanguard in the United States.

The founders of American Trotskyism did not reject or discard any of the theoretical and organizational lessons gained from the experiences of October 1917 and the first five years of the Communist International. To the contrary, they placed these at the cornerstone of their program. More than that, they incorporated into their arsenal the contributions of the Left Opposition arising from the controversies which divided world communism since 1923 over the course to be taken by the first workers state and the strategy of the international struggle against capitalism. They counterposed the program and perspectives of the permanent revolution to the revisionist and nationalist Stalinist innovation of "socialism in one country" and fought for workers democracy against the despotism of the Soviet bureaucracy.

Above all, the founders of our party exposed and rejected the conclu-

sions of reformism, conciliationism and "peaceful co-existence" with the imperialist and democratic bourgeoisie which logically flowed from the theory of "one-country socialism." This line inexorably transformed the American CP and its similars elsewhere from revolutionary opponents of capitalist rule into pressure bodies in the service of Moscow's foreign policy. It led, first to a tacit, then to a more and more explicit, renunciation of any independent class struggle strategy for taking power in their own country.

J.P. Cannon and his associates affirmed confidence in the capacity of the working class in the advanced countries to transform society, as Marxism indicated. The most decisive sector of that class was located in the United States. Basing their program and perspectives on developing the revolutionary potential of the American workers, the pioneer Trotskyists set out to assemble and educate a grouping of revolutionary Marxists committed to the aims of combating and overthrowing American capitalism and building socialism, not in one country but on a world scale. Revolutionary internationalism, workers democracy, a socialist America -- these three ideas have been abiding guidelines of our movement through the four decades of its existence.

II. The Development of American Trotskyism From 1928 to 1968

From the oldest veteran to the newest recruit the ranks of the SWP today span four successive generations of American revolutionists. The disparate age levels of its membership indicate how protracted and difficult the process of reconstituting the revolutionary vanguard in the United States has been in the face of the foundering of the CP.

The evolution of American Trotskyism over the past forty years has not proceeded according to a preconceived plan or followed a direct path. It has been conditioned by colossal world events and the circumstances of its environment which at each stage has imposed specific tasks upon its cadres, circumscribed its sphere of action, and, in the final analysis, determined the rate of its progress and the scope of its achievements.

Our movement has passed through five distinct phases of development since its formation. These time intervals extend roughly from 1928 to 1933; 1933 to 1940; 1940 to 1947; 1948 to 1960; and 1960 to 1968. What have been the salient features, the main tasks, and the principal accomplishments of these different periods?

A. The Pioneering Years: 1928-1933

At its outset our movement put forward its program to the radical public. The clear and comprehensive enunciation of its positions on the key issues of the class struggle accorded with the mandate of Marxism and the practice of Leninism which regard the fundamental program -- and action in harmony with it -- as the prime factor in determining the nature of a political grouping. This original set of revolutionary Marxist ideas has remained the bedrock of our movement, the basis for the recruitment and education of its cadres, and provided the guidelines for all our work. It is incorporated in the most extensive and enduring library of literature available to any tendency of American radicalism.

In this pioneering period the relationship of forces, the fewness of our numbers and international considerations made it necessary to concentrate our activity upon the work of propaganda for our distinctive views. The leadership deliberately decided that the paramount job at that juncture was to form a firm cadre which thoroughly understood the nature of Stalinism and had assimilated the gist of the criticisms and ideas of the Left Opposition. The advice of people who urged us to abandon this more modest task for a grandiose program of "mass work" as a shortcut to greater influence was rejected as unwise.

The energies of the members were devoted to bringing out the weekly Militant regularly and distributing the paper, publishing books and pamphlets popularizing the positions of the Left Opposition, and carrying on other propaganda activities. Participation in mass struggles of one kind or another was subordinated to these primary tasks and remained at a minimum.

The Communist League of America then functioned as an outlawed faction of the Stalinized CP, seeking to win over dissident members and followers to its ideas. It looked to the force of events and its own pressure to change the course of the CP. The policy of reform applied in this country followed the general line of the International Left Opposition led by Trotsky.

Although this tactic failed to check or reverse the degeneration of the CP, it did succeed in assembling a staunch core of several hundred revolutionary militants committed to fundamental Marxist principles. The consistent propaganda struggle against Stalinism armed our members with an understanding of what was happening in the Soviet Union and to the Communist International. This

enabled them to survive, grow and withstand the physical attacks and political pressures exerted by the Stalinists.

The infant movement experienced severe hardships because of the stagnation of organized labor during the depression. Its isolation was intensified by the upsurge of official Communism owing to the mounting prestige of the Soviet Union amidst the manifest collapse of capitalism and the progress made under the First Five-Year Plan which masked the crimes of the bureaucratic regime. However, the conviction of the correctness of its ideas and outlook was an unfailing source of moral stamina which aided our small group to come through that trying time. Notwithstanding its paucity of forces and material resources, American Trotskyism passed its first great test by the sheer fact of its survival. It is today the oldest and stablest section of world Trotskyism.

B. Period of Growth: 1933-1940

Hitler's coming to power in February 1933 changed the Trotskyist attitude toward the CP. At the same time the upsurge of the working class at home following Roosevelt's inauguration and the revival of industry enabled our movement to break out of enforced isolation into a broader arena of mass action.

The terrible defeat inflicted upon the strongest section of the European working class outside the Soviet Union, the capitulation of the German CP without a struggle, and the subsequent refusal of the Comintern leadership to admit the errors which led to the catastrophe doomed the Communist International as an agency of revolution. The recognition of this fact brought about a reorientation of world Trotskyism. From a faction seeking to reform the Communist International and reverse the course of the American CP, we became the heralds of a new International and the building of a new independent revolutionary Marxist party in the United States.

In line with these objectives, our forces turned away from preoccupation with the CP, paid special attention to all those political groups and tendencies which were in ferment and moving, however hesitantly, in a revolutionary direction, and sought to establish closer contacts with them. This endeavor bore its first fruits early in 1934 in the fusion of the Communist League with Muste's American Workers Party. The unification, arrived at after hard negotiation on the basis of common agreement on fundamental principles, gave a big impetus to our movement.

This move on the political front was facilitated and solidified by a simultaneous turn from activity as a circle of propagandists to systematic, if small-scale, entry into mass work among the unemployed and employed. This tactical reorientation was made possible and gave results because of the explosive energies released by the awakened mass militancy, strikes and organizing drives which culminated in the industrial unionism of the CIO.

The preceding creation of cadres knit together on a national scale by common ideas and methods was the indispensable prerequisite for carrying out this twofold transformation of our work in relation to union activity and the cementing of connections with the best of the leftward-moving elements in other political tendencies.

These outward-going initiatives ran up against resistance from sectarian comrades (the Oehlerites) who were stuck fast in the past, refused to keep in step with the march of developments in the class struggle or to recognize and seize the new opportunities for growth. The new course also provided an occasion for the manifestation of opportunism and an inclination to flout party discipline and control under cover of immersion in mass work (Field). Both tendencies had to be combatted and defeated in order to ensure the advancement of the party and its hegemony over its constituents.

The hard-fought victorious Minneapolis teamster strikes along with the integration of our members in the auto, maritime and some other industries gave our movement its first significant footholds in the ranks of the labor movement. The party began to acquire a less literary and petty-bourgeois and a more proletarian composition, spirit and activity. For the remainder of the thirties the extension of trade union work held a top priority for the party.

The unification with the Musteites did not overcome the restrictions upon our expansion imposed by the existence of the CP and the SP which were considerably larger organizations wielding much more weight in radical circles. After the Old Guard quit the Socialist Party in 1935 and Norman Thomas invited other radicals into his all-inclusive organization, we decided to join it in order to win the more militant members of its left wing and youth to revolutionary ideas.

During the short sojourn in the SP from 1936 through 1937 we organized and conducted the campaign to secure asylum for Trotsky in Mexico, save the lives of the Old Bolsheviks, and expose Stalin's frameups in the Moscow Trials through the Dewey Commission of Inquiry. This ambitious and historic undertaking was a landmark in our defense work.

The centrist officialdom of the SP, fearing the rapid spread of our influence and the criticism of their positions on the Spanish Civil War and the condemnation of their support to LaGuardia, the reform-fusion Republican candidate for mayor of New York, expelled the Trotskyists late in 1937.

The balance sheet of entry showed the following positive results. (1) We had won over the majority of the Socialist youth and those workers really interested in making a socialist revolution, more than doubling our numbers. (2) Our forces accumulated valuable political experience. (3) The entry aided our penetration of the auto, maritime and other unions so that the proletarian orientation, which remained a constant concern of our movement, was enhanced. (4) By expelling its left wing, the SP finally cut itself off from the radicalized youth and union militants, dealing itself crippling blows from which it never recovered.

While these developments reduced the superiority of the SP over our forces, the CP retained its overwhelming predominance in the radical movement. Despite its opportunism, the CP continued to grow. From the mid-thirties to the end of the forties it towered over all other tendencies. It was solidly entrenched in the CIO, exercised a strong attraction upon radicalizing intellectuals and in cultural circles, and had the greatest influence among the youth and Afro-Americans. It conducted a merciless slander campaign designed to keep our movement quarantined and ideas tabooed in all these areas. It proved difficult for us to get an objective hearing and overcome the sheer size and weight of the forces under the sway of Stalinism.

The Socialist Workers Party was founded on New Year's Day 1938. The Fourth International was launched nine months later. Although the young party had good prospects and made some headway, it was not given much time to display its capacities. The Moscow Trials and the shadow of the oncoming war led to a retreat of the intellectuals and a dampening of radicalism. Then the Stalin-Hitler Pact, which ushered in the Second World War in August 1939, hit the party, brought out its latent weaknesses, and precipitated the gravest and most thoroughgoing of all the internal struggles in the movement since its inception.

The petty-bourgeois opposition led by Burnham, Shachtman and Abern began its assault on the program of the Fourth International around the issue of the defense of the Soviet Union. But the conflict soon involved most of the basic questions of Marxism from the validity and value of dialectical materialism to the nature of the first workers state and the character of the party. Trotsky described the aims of the opposition as "an attempt to disqualify and overthrow the theoretical foundations, the political principles and organizational methods of our movement."

Impelled by the ferocious anti-Soviet propaganda and the war pressure, Burnham, Shachtman and their followers broke away from the SWP in April 1940. They founded the Workers Party which set up shop in competition with our movement and led a vacillating existence until it was liquidated into the Socialist Party in the 1950's.

Although almost forty percent of the membership went with Burnham and Shachtman, American Trotskyism gained more than it lost from the struggle and split with the petty bourgeois opposition. The struggle tempered the party majority which proved its fidelity to Marxism, its ability to defend its program under fire, and its determination to be a genuinely Leninist and proletarian organization. The controversy also produced two precious contributions to Marxist literature: Trotsky's collection In Defense of Marxism and Cannon's The Struggle for a Proletarian Party. These classics have ever since been indispensable to the education of our members.

Fortunately, the showdown with the minority was concluded months before the USSR was invaded and the U.S. entered the Second World War. Thanks to its intransigent stand in defense of Marxist principles, the party was well equipped to meet these earth-shaking events without wavering or flinching.

C. The War Years and the Postwar Strike Wave: 1940-1947

Months before Pearl Harbor, the party and its foremost unionists were subjected to combined attack by the labor bureaucracy and the federal government. Minneapolis Teamster Local 544 had been the principal base of our influence in the unions and the spearhead of labor organization throughout the Northwest. After its leaders refused to bow before his dictatorial edicts, Tobin, the president of the Teamsters International who was also head of the Democratic Labor Committee, appointed a receiver over the local. When the members voted to disaffiliate from the AFL and join the CIO, Roosevelt at Tobin's behest ordered the Department of Justice to indict the Local 544 officers and SWP leaders under the Smith Act, the first time it was invoked.

The prosecution tested the capacity of both the party and its working class militants to stand by their avowed principles under the most intense pressures.

The party proceeded to organize a nation-wide campaign against the indictments. Through the Civil Rights Defense Committee it developed a strong and broad defense movement which secured support from 150 unions representing over five million members and made the Minneapolis case the most important civil liberties cause during World War II. The activity of the entire party from July 1941 to February 1945 revolved around work on this case which endangered the legal existence of one organization and involved the imprisonment of its best political and union leaders.

The defendants utilized the courtroom to expound their real views against the allegations of the prosecutors. One of the most enduring byproducts of the Minneapolis trial is the official court record of the testimony given by James P. Cannon. For the past three decades Socialism on Trial has been the most widely read primer of Trotskyism and it is the best introduction to the application of Marxist ideas to American problems.

The prosecution of the 18 and the U.S. declaration of war on the day they were sentenced to prison terms signalized the beginning of another period of intense hardship for the party. Unlike the Vietnam war, the war of American imperialism against the Axis was accepted as necessary by the people; socialist opposition to it received scant support. Many young party activists were drafted into the armed forces. The unionists who remained had to swim against the stream. The party had all it could do simply to keep afloat.

After effectively withstanding the first governmental assaults, the membership held on tenaciously and successfully weathered this rigorous wartime isolation. It proved fully capable of moving forward again once the tide turned.

This period of party history falls into two parts. The first comprised almost three years of contraction and defensive struggles under extremely unfavorable conditions capped by the imprisonment of its front-rank leaders. The two outstanding acts of mass resistance during the first part of the war were the March on Washington (which, although it was called off, did give Afro-Americans easier access to more jobs in industry) and the coal miners strikes. The party threw its full support behind both of these struggles.

The second phase emerged as the war fever wore off and new stirrings agitated the ranks of labor. While its leaders were still behind bars, the party moved out to take advantage of the new openings presented by the fight against the wage-freeze, the no-strike pledge and in favor of independent labor political action. The national convention in November 1944 already recorded appreciable signs of progress in various fields: increased sales and subscriptions to The Militant, stepped-up recruitment of workers and Afro-Americans, greater influence in key union locals, and a burst of optimism among the membership.

This expansion continued without letup for the next three years. The entire party stepped out boldly and made progress in numerous directions. It established sizeable and influential fractions in several industrial unions such as auto, steel, rubber, aircraft and maritime. It energetically intervened in movements for Afro-American equality and drew hundreds of black militants into its ranks. The press attained its highest circulation and was often issued twice a week. Party branches were set up in many new localities. By its 1946 convention in Chicago the SWP had the largest membership in its history, having doubled its numbers in the preceding year. It had strong points of support among the industrial workers and in many black communities from coast to coast.

Despite the growth of our party, the slow progress of the Fourth International and the failure of the workers to take power in Western Europe after the downfall of Hitlerism produced a much smaller repetition of petty-bourgeois pessimism and indiscipline in the emergence of the Goldman-Morrow-Loris opposition. This tendency was easily disposed of and, shortly after leaving our movement, its leaders renounced Marxism and fell into political passivity.

By this time the SP had by and large fallen out of the running. The CP on the other hand had acquired almost one hundred thousand members and retained its commanding positions in the unions and other areas. However, it had been discredited among the best union militants and the Afro-American communities by its capitulation to Roosevelt's policies, its support of the no-strike pledge and its discontinuance of all mass struggle against the racists during Stalin's alliance with Roosevelt.

At the same time the unblemished record of the SWP in defense of labor's rights, the interests of the Afro-Americans and its socialist ideas enhanced its reputation in these same circles. The magnificent offensive of the unions against the corporations during the massive strike wave of 1945-47 energized our members and supporters and imparted a powerful impulse to almost all departments of party activity. American labor's greatest upsurge coincided quite properly with the quickest and greatest

growth of our movement.

Owing to the absence of ferment on the campuses and the general weakness of the student movement, we were however unable to reconstitute our youth organization which had been destroyed by the Shachtmanite split.

For a brief time it appeared that the SWP was on the way to transforming itself from the status of a small and restricted propaganda group into an organization of mass agitation and action. Its expanding influence in the left wing of the industrial unions and among the black militants placed that almost within reach. The ranks were poised and ready to realize this objective.

Then, quite unexpectedly, a sharp turn occurred in the national and international situations which altered and nullified this outlook. The consequences of the cold war dashed these hopes, closed off further possibilities of expansion for a prolonged period, and thrust the party back into agonizing isolation for a long term of years.

D. The Cold War Witchhunt Era: 1948-1960

The political terrorism of anti-communism and the witchhunt coupled with the prolonged prosperity, the omnipotent union bureaucratism and labor conservatism beginning with 1947 administered a stiff setback to the whole gamut of American radicalism. While the CP was the main target and victim of capitalist persecution and was dealt the heaviest blows, our party likewise suffered severely at the hands of reaction.

At the opening of this dark period, however, the party took one of its biggest steps forward in national politics. Up to this point it did not have the requisite conditions, forces or resources for entering candidates in the presidential race. In 1948, in the face of competition from the newly formed Progressive Party, our party launched its first presidential ticket. Its candidates conducted a vigorous nationwide campaign to popularize its program against the two major capitalist parties and the short-lived reformist Wallace experiment backed by the CP.

This has been a permanent advance. Overcoming many obstacles, the SWP has never since been absent from the national elections but has regularly run candidates every four years. 1968 witnessed its biggest campaign to date.

The intensified reactionary atmosphere during the Korean War years from 1950 to 1953 placed the party in ever more difficult circumstances. The youth, the Afro-Americans and the union militants were all equally immobilized and the possibilities of recruitment dwindled to a bare minimum.

Under the relentless reaction steady attrition set in. The workers grew more and more unresponsive to our ideas and proposals. Almost the entire membership of most of our largest union fractions in auto, aircraft, steel and maritime was blacklisted and ousted from their jobs. Many fine worker militants, seeing less and less chance for effective opposition against the bureaucracy, drifted out of the party. So did many disappointed black comrades who had expected the party to mobilize wide support for their demands. Branches withered and disappeared.

The Johnson-Forest group, which had returned to the SWP in 1949 after their break with the Shachtmanites, again bolted from the party soon after the Korean War broke out. The processes of desertion eventually affected the inner core of the party through the leaders and followers of the dissident Cochran faction. Their assault on our program, which was intertwined with a split in the Fourth International, erupted at the height of McCarthyism and its excruciating squeeze on our movement. It enlisted the most exhausted and disillusioned elements of the membership.

These cadres had been disheartened by the postwar strangulation of the revolution in Western Europe, the Kremlin's expansion in Eastern Europe and the successes of Stalinism in Asia. Softened by prosperity and wearied by incessant and inconclusive struggling against the stream, they lost faith in the revolutionary potential of the American working class and began to doubt the principles of Marxism and the future of Trotskyism. Above all, they no longer believed in the possibility of building a mass revolutionary party capable of overthrowing capitalism in the United States.

This minority threatened to undo all the basic conquests of our movement since its birth since they were so dead-set against our aim of building a proletarian vanguard party. At the cost of an unavoidable split, the majority did succeed in beating back this challenge to its heritage and further existence. Soon after its defection, the Cochranite combination disclosed its true liquidationist colors, disintegrated, and did not last out the decade.

One of the brightest achievements of those years was the seven-year fight waged around the victimization of the legless veteran, James Kutcher, whose case was deliberately singled out as the most dramatic vehicle for opposing the government loyalty purge. The campaign

on his behalf mobilized widespread sympathy and support and, after eleven hearings, the legless veteran was restored to his job. This was one of the outstanding victories against the witchhunters.

All energies were absorbed during this period to keep the party intact and as active as external conditions permitted. There was no alternative but to ward off the blows and wait out the sweep of reaction.

All other tendencies confronted the same problems. The SP went from bad to worse politically and organizationally, and had little life left by the end of the fifties. The CP suffered the greatest losses. The unions under its domination were expelled from the CIO and many of its opportunist trade union figures like Curran and Quill went over wholly to the labor bureaucracy.

The CP had become so hated and discredited that it could not muster any broad support for its defense against government prosecution. Its ranks grew more and more demoralized and divided. This once-powerful organization was under extremely inept leadership and kept sliding rapidly downhill.

The repercussions of the Khrushchev report confirming Stalin's crimes and the Hungarian revolt in 1956 delivered smashing blows to its unity and morale and decimated its ranks. Thousands walked away in dreadful disillusionment from the party. The CP is still hemorrhaging from the continuing effects of the decomposition of world Stalinism.

Every single grouping on the left suffered drastically during the cold war. The radical movement as a whole lost virtually an entire generation of recruitment. Our party came out of that ordeal with the best morale since world events had substantiated our basic ideas. Making the most of the upheaval in American radicalism generated by the crisis within the hard-hit CP, during the regroupment period our ranks began to move into a position where the immense disproportion of forces and influence between the two organizations, which had prevailed for more than three decades, was steadily lessened to our advantage.

E. Years of Revival: 1960-1968

With the beginning of the sixties the victory of the Cuban Revolution, the civil rights movement, the emergence of the New Left and the end of student apathy spurred the revival of radicalism in several sectors of American society. This was manifested within our own movement by the reconstitution of a Trotskyist youth organization for the first time in twenty years. The Young Socialist Alliance became the prime vehicle for the regeneration of the weakened SWP.

Our party did its utmost to recruit and integrate young rebels from the campus into its depleted ranks and bring them into the leadership. This was imperative in order to cope with the enlarged opportunities presented to it.

The reorientation of our movement to the changed national and international situation and the transition to a wider arena was not accomplished without internal controversies and breaks with a diversified range of dissidents who proved to be unassimilable and undisciplined or had abandoned the convictions we had held in common. These included the Robertson, Wohlforth, Kirk-Kaye, Boulton and Swabeck groups.

All together these did not amount to as much as earlier oppositions and their departures did not impede the progress of our movement from 1960 to 1965. The domestic defections were more than counterbalanced by the healing of the ten-year split in the Fourth International in 1963 which unified the forces of world Trotskyism.

However, the party's attention during the decade was directed not toward such internal dissensions but outward to the struggles agitating the country. Its three principal areas of activity were the black liberation struggle, the student ferment and the antiwar movement.

While the SWP supported every action against racism, it was especially concerned to give aid and keep in step with the most combative and progressive forces in the black liberation struggle such as SNCC, Robert Williams, Malcolm X, the militant nationalists, the Black Panthers and DRUM. Through our solidarity with these militants and the publication of our resolutions, books and pamphlets on their problems, particularly through the contributions of George Breitman, we won a hearing and respect for our positions and ideas. The SWP was the first radical group to recognize and explain the progressive nature and revolutionary implications of black nationalism as expounded by Malcolm X.

From its inception the YSA sought to establish itself on the campuses as the chief spokesman and organizer of the socialist-minded student rebels. By its November 1968 convention it had members on 101 campuses throughout the country and solid locals on many of the leading and largest universities.

This success was largely attributable to the role it had played in the antiwar movement which was based upon the student activists. The SWP was the only

radical party which ran against Johnson in the 1964 presidential campaign and warned against his warlike intentions. The SWP and YSA threw their full forces into the antiwar protest which mounted after Johnson's renewed air strikes against North Vietnam in February 1965. This gave the party its first opening in many years to participate in extensive mass action on a nationwide scale.

We consistently strove to build an antiwar coalition of diverse forces aiming at the mobilization of the largest body of protest around the single issue of ending the war by bringing the troops home at once from Vietnam. In many places the SWP and YSA members and supporters were the best organizers and formed the backbone of the antiwar committees.

The experience of working within the antiwar movement with all its twists and turns from 1964 on was an immensely educative one for our young cadres. The anticapitalist and antiwar positions of the SWP and YSA and their support for the Cuban Revolution, their fight for socialist democracy in the workers states, black nationalism, independent black and labor political action and revolutionary socialism have earned wide esteem in radical circles. This has been evidenced in the remarkable growth of the YSA during the Halstead-Boutelle presidential campaign of 1968 and the concomitant revitalization of the party.

Rival tendencies have not benefited in equal measure over this period largely because of their inability to adjust their policies to the necessities of the struggles unfolding among the student youth, the black nationalists and the antiwar activists. On the other hand, our movement has made its gains by recognizing the requirements of their struggles and working out a correct and consistent attitude toward them.

* *

Our party has three times had to endure isolation and fight for its survival: from 1929 to 1933; in the first years of the Second World War; and during the cold war. It successfully came through these periods of extreme adversity, despite defections.

A revolutionary party which has set itself the goal of combatting and defeating the mightiest of imperialist powers on its home ground must always be prepared to meet and parry the blows of reaction. But that is not the situation now facing our movement. From all signs we are entering a phase of intensified mass radicalism with highly promising conditions for the rapid growth of the revolutionary vanguard.

All the developments we have outlined have paved the way for gaining hegemony over all competing tendencies within American radicalism. This prospect is within reach. In the latter part of the sixties the relationship of forces among the rival tendencies of American radicalism have continued to shift in our favor. Today in many regions the SWP is stronger than the CP and is in some places the only active and organized radical group.

On the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of American Communism, our forces face the future with assurance. The SWP consciously carries forward the best traditions of America's revolutionary past embodied in such figures as Sam Adams and Tom Paine, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth and Nat Turner, Wendell Phillips and John Brown, Albert Parsons, Mother Jones, Eugene Debs and "Big Bill" Haywood. It is determined to become the kind of multi-national revolutionary Marxist party which can lead the masses of America to victory over the capitalist ruling class and to socialism in association with the other liberated peoples on this planet.

August 15, 1969
New York